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REVIEWS AND NOTES

MYTHICAL BARDS AND THE LIFE OF WILLIAM WALLACE by William Henry Schofield, Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature, Volume V, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1920.

There are doubtless many scholars who do not need Professor Schofield's book to convince them that no blind man could have written the *Wallace*. Bored almost to extinction by the arguments *pro* and *con* they may well have fallen back upon some swift intuitive process of attaining the truth. Professor Schofield, of course, had intuitions of his own; but to the support of these he brought in the book under review a carefully reasoned argument. Furthermore, he here convicted of their error those who have cried from the depths of their ennui that the *Wallace-frage* was in any case of no importance. What, indeed, Professor Schofield did was to redeem the question by raising it above the level of puerile conjecture. Casting his net far and wide, he reviewed in a highly suggestive way ideas of great antiquity and vitality, and he brought out relations between myths and folk-lore on the one hand and critical theory on the other that should be of unusual interest to students and investigators in many fields.

Blind Harry, Professor Schofield contends, is a pseudonym of legendary and mythical associations, which was assumed by the author of the *Wallace* that the poem should have something of the character of an inspired document. The only obstacle in the way of accepting this theory is the testimony of the chronicler Major that "there was one Henry blind from his birth who, in the time of my childhood, composed a whole book about William Wallace;" what favors it is not only Schofield's array of evidence and carefully conducted argument but common sense, which, Major or no Major, simply declines to accept the poem with its descriptive passages and its Chaucerian echoes as written by a poet congenitally blind. Scottish patriotism may seek compromises: the poet, though blind was not blind from birth, and Blind Harry collaborated with others. Or, say if you will, he was blind in only one eye. Many critics in such ways have befogged an issue which Schofield had the sanity to see clearly and to argue intelligently.

Here and there, to be sure, our author enjoyed a conjecture of his own. Is Blind Harry to be identified not only with Geradh mac Morn but with Guaire Goll, Blind Guaire of the *Colloquy of the Elders*? Is Master Blair of the Latin book which Blind Harry cites, to be equated with Merlin's Master Blaise? Whatever one might think of these guesses,

Schofield was certainly right in giving the attention that he does in Chapter III to Dunbar's "nakit Blynd Harry" in *The Droichis Part of the Play*, who, unaccoutered as he is, was deliciously identified by Professor Schipper with "the author of the famous epic poem, *William Wallace*,—alluded to here as a popular personage." In reality he is the son of "mickle Gow mac Morn" and therefore a brother of Blind Ossian; he looks a good deal, like Garaidh (Garry, Gairri) who appears in Irish documents as a decrepit old man telling tales mournfully of the Fianna whom he has outlived." Like Amergin and Taliessin he was a shape-shifter, and about all that we are told of him there hangs the atmosphere of myth. What more probable than that Blind Harry, (like Blind Ossian, like Merlin and Taliessin in other cases) should be allowed to take the place of the true author of the *Wallace*? To advance from this position to the contention that Blind Harry is really a balewise spirit and that he is in accord with the savage patriotism of the *Wallace* is perhaps gratuitous. At any rate one remembers that the dwarf of Dunbar's poem has been described as a "playful and wanton but beneficent spirit."

To the real as distinguished from the fictive author of the *Wallace* Professor Schofield devoted some thirty pages of his book. He has little if anything to add to what must have been the impression of any sensible reader of the poem. It appears not unlikely that the poet was a herald or a "minstrel"; he "was sympathetic to the higher classes, whether or not he belonged to them himself"; he was "certainly no quiet scholar or amiable, chivalric ecclesiastic, like Barbour, but a vigorous propagandist, a ferocious *realpolitiker*, without principle when it was a question of Scotland's place in the sun, without reluctance to lie in manipulating history to his end. He was no common strolling bard."

The late Professor Schofield will be remembered for the unflinching gusto and the spirit of adventure with which he addressed himself to the most baffling problems of research. It is gratefully recognized that the play of his imagination did much to relieve the hard outlines of philological discipline and to encourage a wider and freer exploration of the realms of literary scholarship. His active sympathy and curiosity along with his many human contacts particularly qualified him for his influential position as Professor of Comparative Literature at Harvard University. That he was steadily broadening his field of research and perfecting his method is clear from the book here noticed, the latest and possibly the best of his publications. It is a reminder of the loss we have suffered in the untimely death of Professor Schofield.

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